Collaborative Writing in L2 Classrooms.
Neomy Storch. Tonowanda, New York: Multilingual Matters. 2013. Pp. vii + 192.

With the appearance and improvement of Web 2.0 technology and other digital tools such as Google Docs and wikis, teachers and researchers are increasingly able to implement collaborative activities in face-to-face and online language courses. Whether technologically assisted or done in person, collaboration is a burgeoning area of investigation in L2 writing research and practice. Although many researchers and teachers alike still consider writing an independent activity, *Collaborative Writing in L2 Classrooms* has taken the charge to illuminate the potential advantages of employing collaborative writing in language research and by extension pedagogical practice. To do so, Storch offers a comprehensive review of the current research on L2 collaborative writing, while identifying that there remains theoretical uncertainty concerning how writing tasks affect the product and process of collaborative writing across and within learner contexts, and how the formation of collaborative pairs and groups may change the nature of the collaborative writing project. By discussing these issues and advocating for the guided use of collaboration in L2 writing research, Storch eloquently builds a bridge to span the gulf between collaborative activities L2 research (which has predominantly been used for aural and oral task) and the domain of L2 writing. Storch presents compelling theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical rationales in this well-written analysis of the research on writing in L2 classrooms, and she provides useful recommendations and caveats to researchers and teachers.

From the start, Storch lays the foundation for her definition of *collaboration.* She draws on the works of Ede and Lunsford (1990), who posit that collaborative writing should yield a single written document that is composed with purposeful interaction at every stage of the composition process, and is done with a shared responsibility to plan, to generate, and to deliberate ideas for the text. From this viewpoint, collaborative writing is both a cooperative process and a unique product. However, Storch maintains, this definition of collaborative writing does not encompass the activities of peer editing because of limited interaction that occurs at prescribed times (e.g., after the writing is completed). This also means that tasks designed for collaboration, but not for the generation of a unique co-authored product are also not defined as collaborative writing tasks. The author uses her own research (e.g., Storch, 1998, 2001) as examples where learners were asked to revise or reconstruct texts they did not compose or negotiate the design of. For these tasks, Storch draws upon Hirvela's (2007) term *collaborative approaches to writing*, arguing that tasks in which learners are not involved in constructing a text be labelled as *collaborative editing* or *reconstruction tasks* rather than *collaborative writing tasks*.

With the goals of encouraging further research on L2 collaborative writing, and nurturing the idea that collaborative writing activities in L2 classrooms is possible face-to-face and online, *Collaborative Writing in L2 Classrooms* critically reviews and presents summaries of L2 research on collaborative writing and identifies future research directions across eight information packed chapters. Chapter 1 presents a detailed and reasoned definition of L2 collaborative writing for the reader to contextualize the research discussed in the chapters that follow it. The definition develops from the touchstone of L1 research, which has a rich history of using collaborative writing for the development of writing skills and general knowledge (e.g., Brufee, 1999; Wolfe, 2010). The author then proceeds to tell the reader a bit of important

information, "…I will refer to studies reporting on learners completing such grammar task [e.g., cloze or text reconstruction, joint editing] in pairs as their findings are of relevance to the discussion of collaborative writing as a site for language learning" (p.3). This is important to keep in mind while reading the other chapters, because in some chapters, Storch thoughtfully presents tables that list studies and their contributions, but not all of the studies fit the original definition of *collaborative writing* presented in the book. This point is worth remembering when considering what research has been conducted on collaborative writing under the description put forth by Ede and Lunsford (1990) and supported by Storch.

In chapter 2, Storch presents theories of language acquisition and learning that provide for theoretical and pedagogical rationales for the use of collaborative writing tasks L2 classrooms and L2 research. She draws from both the cognitive and sociocognitive domains to ground collaborative writing into the interaction (e.g., Long, 1996) and socio-interaction (e.g., Swain, 2010) frameworks of language learning. The Vygotskian approach to the sociocognitive view is discussed in terms of Swain's notion of *languaging*, and Donato's (1994) *collective scaffolding* rather than in purely theoretical terms. By establishing the usefulness of these theories to researching speaking task, Storch purports that collaborative writing tasks may be a richer environment for language learning, as learners must deliberate and negotiate introspectively and with each other to produce a written text. She concludes the chapter with a discussion on approaches to L2 collaborative writing instruction that pushes teachers to think beyond traditional approaches to L1 collaborative writing, which employ peer review as a curricular mainstay.

Chapter 3 reviews empirical research on collaborative L2 writing and it is presented in three main sections: (1) the language used in collaborative activities, (2) the kinds of feedback learners provide to each other during collaborative sessions, and (2) the opportunities for language practice through collaborative writing. Language Related Episodes (LRE) are the most commonly focused upon unit of speech in collaborative writing research. An LRE (Swain, 1998) is the language used to deliberate about the language to be used to complete a task. This chapter presents several examples of LREs that have been used in published research to demonstrate how collaborative writing can bring language learning to fruition. Form-based grammar interactions, lexis-based negotiations & clarifications, mechanically-focused interactions, and discourse-based interactions are some examples of the LREs presented and discussed in this chapter. The presentation of these LREs is coupled with a discussion concerning the potential pitfalls of looking solely at LREs as a measure of success (or failure) of learner participation in collaborative activities. One reason offered is the learner's developmental stage may not provide them with control over necessary language knowledge to take advantage of information created in LREs. She warns that while LREs can be an instance for learners to practice and acquire language, many other factors may affect the number of and the quality of LREs. This point becomes the driving force behind chapter 4.

The fourth chapter presents a critical discussion of research utilizing LREs as the unit of analysis in their investigation of collaborative writing. Storch provides a table with the details for 35 studies, describing the learner and their contexts, the task used in the study, and what the treatment or implementation of collaborative writing was (including the time allowed, pairing methods, and proficiency levels within and among groups, etc). The chapter uses several

examples from these studies to consider and scrutinize factors that may impact the number and quality of the LREs found in the talk of learners in collaborative writing activities. These include research that employed grammar-focused tasks and peer revision, which was deemed outside of the purview of Storch's established definition of collaborative writing. However, the inferences drawn from these activities are in terms of the language students used in their interactions, and thus their implication to collaborative writing are relevant within the scope of collaboration and language learning. Storch provides empirical findings that show a trend in which more LREs are produced in grammar-based tasks (e.g., text reconstruction) than meaning-based tasks (e.g., jigsaw tasks), but she identifies that lexis-based LREs are the most common LRE in meaning-based tasks. The discussion of task effects on the kind and types of LREs produced by learners is critical and enlightening, as it questions the largely accepted view that successfully resolved LREs is tantamount to language learning. This was further problematized by introducing literature on the fact that group and pair dynamics can be an important variable in creating or preventing instances of LREs and their resolutions.

With the discussion up to this point centering on what happens during collaborative writing, chapter 5 introduces and reviews research investing collaborative writing outcomes. Storch argues the product of a collaboratively written text is more than just a single text. Other language components, such as control of new vocabulary and increased knowledge about a given field (e.g., how to respond to an email), are potential results as well. Often, research has considered evidence of a positive outcome to a collaborative writing task as a text that is longer than a text that could have been written if the team completed the task individually. However, as Storch notes, Storch and Wigglesworth (2007) demonstrate that collaborative writing often contains greater linguistic accuracy than single-authored papers. This point builds upon the literature discussed in chapter 3, and expands that discussion to include research designs and ways of representing evidence of language learning. More than half of this chapter discusses the different research designs (e.g., pre/post/delayed-post test, tailor-made post-test, and process-product) utilized to illustrate the various ways outcomes have been represented and learning has been operationalized.

Chapter 6 discusses important learner characteristics that can affect the outcomes of collaborative writing lessons, and the results of L2 writing research. Storch presents an informative discussion of learner beliefs by citing her own teaching experiences as well as the few research studies investigating learner perspectives and evaluations of collaborative activities. Storch provides evidence that not only students' perceptions of but also their prior language learning experiences impact their attitude towards collaborative writing. Integral to identifying students' attitudes and beliefs is an understanding of their learning contexts and their perception of their language-learning self. The few in-depth and longitudinal studies conducted to date show that attitudes are not static and other significant factors outside of the classroom can affect learners in positive and negative ways. Storch offers McDonough's (2004) study as an example where students who worked collaboratively showed language learning gains, but despite these gains the learners felt collaboration was not useful for language learning. It is important to recall that outcomes and success in collaborative writing have frequently been operationalized in terms of the number of successfully resolved LREs. With this in mind, and from this perspective alone, Storch provides another useful table of 14 studies, detailing the participants, the task used in the research, and the type and percent of correctly resolved LREs. The chapter concludes with some

data from interviews with students who have mixed reactions and experiences with collaborative writing.

With the relatively new and readily available technologies for collaboration, Chapter 7 focuses on computer-mediated collaborative writing. Here, Storch briefly discusses the current research on collaborative writing using digital resources that are text-based. Her focus in this chapter, however, is on wikis and is grounded with ample studies from L1 classroom research (details for many of these studies are accessible in a table). While the discussion on wikis runs throughout the chapter, Storch also provides other uses for technology such as immediate post-test designs. She also suggests that the incorporation of the making the texts publically available brings a real-stakes use to the texts, as opposed to the teacher as the end-user. The detailed and relevant discussion on uses of wikis in L1 classrooms is followed by an equally long section on wikis in the L2 classrooms. Again, Storch meticulously combed the current research and picked exemplar studies, which she synthesized into a table with details about the context of the research, the tasks and assessments, the implementation, and the data analysis tools. These 16 studies represent a broad range of activities and languages (SL and FL), and demonstrate the possibilities for task diversity and implementation of wikis in the L2 contexts.

The book concludes with Chapter 8, a summary of the themes covered in the book and a recapitulation of reasons for which Storch advocates collaborative writing in both face-to-face and digital contexts. Important issues are discussed (e.g., grading and grouping), and suggestions on implementing collaborative writing in the classrooms are offered to teachers. For example, modelling the collaborative interaction for students as a pre-task activity has been identified as one way to help students create more opportunities for collaborative interaction. This modeling can take place in person or on video, and thus can be tried in either teaching mode. For researchers, Storch draws further attention to issues with current research (e.g., what impacts a learner's willingness to do collaborative writing) and she follows this with a short discussion and call for more research investigating how collaboration occurs (e.g., qualitative accounts, longitudinal studies, and microgentic analysis). A reader will be well-prepared to internalize such ideas, in light of the information from the in-depth analysis proffered in the previous chapters of this book.

With *Collaborative Writing in L2 Classrooms*, Neomy Storch has presented a strong and authoritative book on a new and expanding area of research in L2 writing. It does an excellent job presenting SL and FL research with the sharp reminder that SL environments have taken the lion's share of published language research. Additionally, this book makes a strong move to challenge the notion that writing is an independent activity. Storch's treatment of the topic discusses theoretically compelling and pedagogically important issues that make this book a welcome addition to the L2 writing scholarship. This book is a must0have volume for any language researcher looking to deepen their understanding of and contribute to this expanding area of L2 writing scholarship.

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